

2 SPIRIT OF THE PRESS.

EDITORIAL OPINIONS OF THE LEADING JOURNALISTS UPON CURRENT TOPICS—COMPILED EVERY DAY FOR THE EVENING TELEGRAPH.

What Inflation Means.

From the N. Y. Nation. There is a general expectation at this writing that the success of the effort to put a stop to the contraction of the currency will be followed by an equally successful attempt at further inflation. Into the expediency or expediency of arresting the process of contraction we shall not here enter at any length. There is a good deal to be said against this mode of getting back to specie payments as well as for it. Unquestionably, if the whole of the greenbacks were swept out of existence during the coming year, gold and silver would rush in to fill their places, but they would have to be bought like any other commodities, and we are ill prepared just now to buy them. The greenbacks have the recommendation of being the cheapest currency that can be devised, and inflation is certainly not ready just yet to go back to the more expensive substitute; and it is possible that the withdrawal of even four millions a month is more than the country is yet able to bear.

It is suffering first and foremost from the enormous waste of labor and material which occurred during the war. No country can absolutely fling away—we are now speaking simply economically—\$2,000,000,000 worth of labor and the results of labor inside of four years, and get all over it in two years. It is suffering next of all from the most vexatious, unphilosophical, clumsy, and demoralizing system of taxation which any country in Christendom was ever subjected. We say in Christendom, because we are willing to admit that in certain Mohammedan countries the present revenue laws of the United States have been surpassed, if not in number and complexity, at least in unreasonableness and disregard of the taxpayers' comfort and welfare.

But then these Mohammedan rulers never pretended to be politicians in our sense of the word, or to entertain any regard whatever either for principles of human nature or the experience of mankind. Our financiers do pretend to be politicians, and occasionally in moments of great excitement even call themselves political economists. The two things, therefore, that the country most needs are time and opportunity to replace its lost wealth by economy and hard work, and the freedom of trade from vexatious pursuit at the hands of the tax-gatherer. With these two, rapid and complete recovery may be made, and a very short space of time is tolerably certain.

We believe most firmly that there is more money afloat than the country needs to carry on business. A country can hardly have too much money in it if the money be specie. If there is too much, it will be exported for the purchase of things that people want more. The beauty of gold and silver is, that if you do not want them, other people do. You ship them off and buy "luxuries" with them, and are none the worse for it. With paper money the case is different. The supply does not depend on the demand, but on votes in Congress, and if more is issued than is needed, there is no way of getting rid of it. Nobody out of the country in which it is issued wants it, and the people on whom it is showered are obliged to meet its redundancy by using more of it in their transactions; or, in other words, raising the price of their commodities.

But, supposing a certain quantity of paper money once issued, and prices adapted to it, and no more of it to be issued, the country adapts its business to it, no matter how large the quantity may be. We might be just as happy and prosperous paying \$20 in greenbacks for a pound of coffee as we are now when paying forty cents. If we were sure there would be no more greenbacks put in circulation. But the curse of greenbacks and of all paper money is that we do not know how much of it will be put in circulation. As long as Congress is what it is, and there are engravers and printing presses in the United States, no human being can tell whether there will be more currency in existence next year than in this, or whether there will be less. In other words, what makes this paper currency detestable is that as long as we have no other there can be no certainty in business; and next to time and industry, certainty about the future is just now what the country needs to recover.

If everybody will agree to let the currency alone for the next five or ten years, neither to contract nor expand it, we shall get on perfectly well, if we know that then, or within a reasonable period, the Government will be prepared to redeem it in coin, or even to begin to redeem it gradually. Paper money has many advantages. It is light, portable, and cheap. It is objectionable because it is a kind of money that ignoramus or knaves can easily tinker, or inflate, or contract, and because, therefore, as long as it is in use the fortune of every man in the community is at the mercy of ignoramus or knaves. As long as a citizen is a citizen in Washington, of whom only a small number have ever in their lives devoted one hour's attention to the study of any financial or economical question, of whom probably very many go to Congress with such notions of the laws of currency as circulate in village bar-rooms, and of whom many more may be the mere tools of speculators, can any day run a bill through under the previous question ordering the Secretary of the Treasury to diminish the money of the country by one hundred millions, or increase it by one hundred millions, no man can be civilized community can possibly thrive. As long as persons as ill-informed as large numbers of members of Congress show themselves to be in all debates on this class of questions, have the power of deciding by vote whether a mortgage, or a promissory note, or a stock of goods, shall on any day in the week rise or fall fifty per cent. in value, the effect on trade is very much the same as that of war. It is like, barring the physical fear, living in constant exposure to incursions of Indians or Mahahrats cavalry, or to bombardment from an

enemy's fleet. It is a burning disgrace that in the nineteenth century, with the lessons of a thousand years of history open before us, and with the teachings of science weighing down our book shelves, not that we should have nothing but paper money—for that is a mistake simply, incurred for noble ends—but that there should be men amongst us, calling themselves legislators, who do not know what the evils of paper money are, or who, knowing them, pass inglorious nights and more inglorious days trying to aggravate them.

We have the less hesitation in using strong language with regard to all schemes of inflation, because, at present, they are simply devices for filling the pockets of large holders of stocks of goods, or, in other words, of large speculators at the expense of the poor. An advocate of inflation is not simply a bad economist, he is a conspirator against the laboring classes. At the bottom of the outcry for more greenbacks there is, of course, much ignorance, but there is also the desire of a very energetic and very knowing body of men to get rid of goods at an advance. Of course, they probably see very well that as expansion means a general rise of prices, they would, in the long-run, not profit by it. But they care nothing about the long run. They want to get out of the present difficulties, meet their engagements easily, and trust to luck for the future. They try to persuade the working-man, too, that with more money they could employ more labor; but the working-man is a fool if he believes them. It is not with greenbacks that wages are paid, but with the things that greenbacks purchase, and the more greenbacks there are, the less food and clothing and shelter will a paper dollar buy. Moreover, times of inflation are always times of wild speculation. We have seen this during the war. For every fresh issue of paper already made, dealers add one dollar to their prices, and then add another dollar to provide for the other issues which they believe may still be made, so that the laborer finds his comforts every day getting further out of his reach, and his necessities every day harder to reach. Moreover, though inflation may at first give the demand for labor a little stimulus, it is a stimulus such as brandy gives the physical energies. It is soon over. There can be no sudden increase of paper money without an increase of uncertainty as to the future. Those who have made money by one issue always want another very soon; and insecurity is the great destroyer of enterprise, and without enterprise industry must languish and laborers suffer.

The overthrow of the impachment projects shows clearly that common sense and moderation are at last reasserting their sway over the majority. But we would warn those who think the party can be helped by yielding to the present cry for expansion, that if it should prove, as it assuredly will prove, that expansion, instead of being a relief, is simply an increase of misery by this time next year people will, as is not unusual in such cases, have forgotten all about the cry; they will remember that the Republican party yielded to it. Workingmen are already beginning to decide on the comparative merits of the two great parties by comparing prices in the old Democratic days with prices in these days of radicalism. The process, we admit, is not a very philosophical one, but it might prove awkward if it were continued in use and gained in favor till November, 1868. Moreover, if experience, and especially experience during the last five years, has proved anything, it proves that the safest course, both for politicians and editors, is to hold on firmly to the teachings of justice and science and history; let passions or delusion carry the people ever so widely away from them, they are sure, in a country like this, to come back to them at last; and the next sower by this time next year will be the highest sower—those whose faith in the teachings wavers least, and whom the returning tide finds still at their posts.

The Great Snow Storm.

From the N. Y. Herald. Despite all the prognostications of the weatherwise that the present would prove a mild winter, the threats of Wednesday in the chilly air and the aspect of the clouds and the direction of the wind, were speedily fulfilled by a snow storm which forebodes a winter of extraordinary severity. Our telegraphic weather reports announced that at nine o'clock Thursday morning it was raining at Richmond, that heavy sleet was falling at Washington, that snow and rain were commingled at Wilmington, in Delaware; that it was snowing at Philadelphia as well as in New York, that it was cloudy at Boston and Portland, and clear at Fort Hood. In this city the snow was falling lightly at one o'clock in the morning, with a gentle breeze from the north-east, which increased to a gale by ten o'clock, when the snow fell thick and fast, seriously impeding travel and bringing business almost to a standstill. The tracks of the city railroads were cleared by the aid of snow ploughs; four horses and two drivers were put on each car, and during the greater part of the day the cars, although reduced in number, made their usual time. Stages, hacks, and drays were sent with great difficulty, horses frequently slipping and falling in the way the most distressing to the sensitive Mr. Bergh. Pedestrians found the streets difficult to travel, and several persons were run over, narrowly escaping with their lives. Scarcely a lady was to be seen on Broadway; indeed, an army of "street soldiers" would have been invisible at the distance of a block. The wagons of express companies, especially those which were overloaded, and all heavy teams, could scarcely move. The ferryboats arrived unusually only through the earlier part of the day. All the Sound boats except the Newport boat were in on time. The railroad trains from Philadelphia and elsewhere came in safely and on time during the early portion of the day, but in the evening they were all delayed. The furious wind that drove the blinding snow through the air and along the ground spoiled the prospect of an immediate sleighing carnival. The ground was left almost bare in many spots, while in others the snow was drifted into formidable heaps. We trust that the police will remind householders and storekeepers of their duty to have the snow removed at once from the sidewalks in front of their premises. This duty often seems to be especially neglected in front of Government buildings. When shall we reach so high a degree of civilization as to have—as the Parisians have, for instance, along the Rue de Rivoli—miles of covered sidewalks? The aggregate sum wasted in spoiled umbrellas, overcoats, overshoes, etc., within a few months, in New York, would suffice to build piazzas on both sides of Broadway throughout its entire length.

Mr. Dickens in America.

From the N. Y. World. As not a few public journals and a good many private individuals really seem to regard Mr. Dickens' second visit to America as a very bold British experiment upon the irascible genius of our untrifled Democracy, it is perhaps worth while to say at once that the idea of making such a visit was originally suggested to the great novelist several years ago, from our own side of the water. It is now some ten years since Mr. Dickens first hit upon the notion of turning his vocal and mimetic abilities to account in the popularization of his written works. His brilliant compeer, the lamented Thackeray, had led the way for him, in those successful lectures on the "English Humorists" and the "Four Georges," which were announced and conducted by sundry privileged authorities in literature as a shocking condescension to the vulgar curiosity about celebrated authors; but which nevertheless not only filled the lecturer's pockets, but greatly extended the circle of his legitimate literary influence. Undeterred by the cynics who sneered at a great writer's making a "wild beast show" of himself, the author of "Pickwick" followed in the wake of the author of "Pendennis"; and very soon found himself bettering the instructor, which were denounced indeed by sundry rapidly attained a popularity in England which induced an enterprising resident of this good city to press upon Mr. Dickens the propriety of bringing them across the Atlantic, and that with so much force and skill that an arrangement was entered into for that purpose, and a contract actually drawn up. The execution of the project was prevented, however, by the interposition of sundry legal difficulties arising out of business transactions with which Mr. Dickens was at that time occupied in England. These facts were matters of public notoriety at the time, and we disclose no mystery, therefore, in claiming for our excellent fellow-citizen, Mr. Brady, the photographer, whatever credit may justly attach to him for being sensible enough to see, and persuasive enough to make a British author see, that the American people are not so illigal as to quarrel with a good piece of bread and butter because it happens to be spread by a person who once made faces at them. Mr. Dickens' new ex-

perience in America, brief as it has been, must have already sufficed to convince him that Mr. Brady was right in his estimate of the good sense and the good taste of Americans. The truth is that, "touchy" as our people have long been reputed to be, there are no audiences in the world so little likely as American audiences are to prejudice whatever may be offered to them in virtue of extraneous circumstances. Neither the London nor Paris is the average of public audiences so fair and candid as in New York. An evening journal comments, possibly by way of a joke, upon the "quiet good order and attention" of Mr. Dickens' first audience in this city as worthy of notice, in view of the notorious "vulgarity and boisterousness and general bad behavior" of American assemblages. If this was meant as a quiz upon British notions of American public gatherings, it was hardly just to forget that the only British writer who has made a special study of this point in our ways and works, Mr. Oxenford, of the London Times, has taken particular pains to speak of American, and especially of New York audiences as remarkable for their good breeding and decorum. This superiority is only a natural fruit of the superior average education of the American people. When Robert Lowe's idea shall have been realized, and England shall have educated her "new masters," similar results may be looked for even there. Mr. Dickens' visit may be made may to our own countrymen if he will take the trouble, as no doubt he will, to impress this lesson of his experience upon their minds. New York, Mr. Dickens may take it as certain, is but a fair representative of America in this particular. How things went at Boston we cannot say, nor does it much matter; for Boston, though an interesting and, we believe, virtuous city, is very far from being in any respect characteristically American. A people who look upon Sumner as a statesman, and prefer baked beans to Biot, are capable of anything. The only positively objectionable feature of the Dickens readings in this city so far, for example, is Bostonian. We mean the attempt to turn Mr. Dickens into a reading-master, by inducing his hearers to buy at the doors small pamphlet copies of the selections which the great novelist is to read on a given evening, and to fix upon these printed pages the attention which should be given to the reciter himself. This abominable practice, we might originally have named with Rachel, and had some slight excuse in the presumable unfamiliarity of foreign audiences with the French tongue and with French tragedies, may perhaps have been necessary in Boston, where the literary culture of the inhabitants is chiefly confined to the Atlantic Monthly and the effusions of "Timothy Titcomb." It has no such "reason of being" here, and ought to be promptly "squelched" at the doors before it can get into the house. Its effect in the days of Rachel used to be to frighten every body, at brief intervals, into the belief that a severe rainstorm had suddenly set in. The peril of this being conjured, however, Mr. Dickens will have quite as much reason to be proud of his New York hearers as his New York hearers to be pleased with him.

The New Constitution.

From the N. Y. Evening Post. We published recently an outline of the Constitution which the Alabama Convention has presented to the people of the State for adoption, and which is subsequently to go to the Congress of the United States for ratification. It is the first of that crop of new Constitutions that is to grow up out of the war and its consequences. It deserves, on that account, more than usual study and reflection. It exhibits the negro for the first time as a participator in legislation, and may be regarded also as a specimen of the kind of political document which is likely to be prepared in other Southern States, under the recent acts of Congress.

This constitution begins with a strong and comprehensive bill of rights to which we presume Alabama will object. The greater part of it seems to be taken from the Declaration of Independence, or from the preamble to the old Virginia Constitution passed in the early days of the republic, when the popular inspiration was strong, and the sentiment of liberty animated the hearts of all men. So far, then, it cannot be otherwise than excellent. These old formulas of truth, intended to guard the people from the encroachments of power, cannot be too familiar to us, or too often repeated by the permanent organs of Government, which are the pledge and shield of our freedom.

In the distribution, too, of the various departments of the State government, in the description and limitation of their functions, the Alabama charter follows pretty closely the best models of the free States, improving upon their provisions, in some respects, and falling behind them in few, if any. All offices are made elective, but the judges serve for six years, senators for four, and assemblymen for two. A board of education is instituted, and specific taxes set aside for the support of those by whom its purposes are to be carried into effect. In all, this, again, the Convention appears to have been governed by the examples of the free States, whose political organization is supposed to be the most advanced and perfect. It would have been better, doubtless, to render the tenure of judges during good behavior; but, as the Convention of our own State boggles over that point, we are not to be surprised that they hesitated in Alabama to do so.

But now comes the important query—who are to be the electors by whom this new Government is to be empowered? Who are to vote under it and to hold office under it? The general answer is, "all male citizens, native or naturalized, twenty-one years of age, who have been residents of the State for one year," which is as liberal as it can be; but the Assembly is ordered to provide a registration of such citizens, from which the following classes of persons are excluded:—

First. Those who, during the late Rebellion, inflicted or caused to be inflicted any cruel or unusual punishment upon any soldier, or sailor, marine, employe, or citizen of the United States, or who in any other way violated the rules of civilized warfare. Second. Those who may be disqualified from holding office by the provisions of the Constitution of the United States, known as Article XIV, and those who have been disqualified from registering to vote for delegates to the Convention in Alabama, by the Constitution, provided that the Legislature may remove said disabilities. Third. Those who shall be convicted of treason, embezzlement of public funds, malfeasance in office, penitentiary offenses, or bribery. Fourth. Those who are idiots or insane.

But, finally, before any one can be registered, he is to take an oath, "to support the Constitution of the State of Alabama, to accept the civil and political equality of all men, and to agree not to deprive any one, on account of color, race, or previous condition, of any political or civil right."

Now, if these words are not misquoted, and we understand them, they mean that no man is to be allowed to register his name as a voter who is unwilling to swear that he is in favor of the immediate and universal suffrage of the negroes. We have heard of a great many tests as qualifications for the franchise—property qualifications, educational qualifications, religious qualifications, and various loyal qualifications—but it has never before been required that a man should take an oath in the political capacity of others before he should be enfranchised himself. Carry out this test, and we shall next hear of conventions that require subscription to the Chicago platform, or the Philadelphia platform, or the Baltimore platform, or some other shibboleth of a party creed. Parties, in fact, will soon come to disfranchise each other, as the Mexican and Spanish parties often do, till political contests are no longer a struggle of votes, but a struggle of force.

We ourselves believe most heartily in the natural equality of all men. We believe that all men are entitled to civil rights and to the protection of the Government in the exercise of them. We believe that political rights ought to be diffused as extensively as possible throughout the community, and that no partial or class qualifications ought to be adopted; but we know a great many very good men who do not agree with us in these particulars; and shall we, on that account, deprive them of the suffrage? We know very good men who think, as the editors of the Express lately, with a large party behind them, that foreigners ought not to be suffered to vote; shall we disfranchise them for that opinion? There are hosts in California who maintain that it would not be at all wise to make voters of those Asiatics and heathen the Chinese; shall we exclude them from the registry? There are sixteen thousand Republicans in Kansas, and two hundred Democrats in Ohio, who hold that negroes are yet unworthy of participating in the Government; must they be ostracized? In a word, is a man's mere belief or sentiment in regard to any question of political policy to be made the test of his capacity for the suffrage or of his eligibility to office? Yet that is precisely the test which the Alabama Convention requires of all who are to be registered as electors, and of all who are to be chosen to any political position.

There are in Alabama thousands of men who are not yet prepared "to accept the political and civil equality of all men," in the shape it has taken in that State; they do not honestly regard the negro so lately a slave as fit to exercise the franchise, to sit on juries, and to become legislators and governors; they allege that he has had no experience of self-government, that he cannot read and write, that he is ignorant of the commonest truths, and that he is still the degraded and brutalized victim of slavery; and that time, a probation, the use and wont of freedom, the custom of obedience to law, rather than to a master's will, is necessary to his proper education into citizenship, is necessary to render him a responsible and self-determining being and not the tool of demagogues and intriguers; but for such opinions are these men to have no vote in Alabama?

They may be wrong opinions; they may be vulgar prejudices; they may arise every day from malignant hostility to the negro; but are men to be disfranchised because they are not so enlightened or liberal as to approve of the negro's enfranchisement? Apply the same test in many other States, not so recently emancipated from the old tyranny of caste as Alabama, and a majority of their people would scarcely be found in the intellectual and moral condition which this test makes the sine qua non of legislation. It was no doubt natural that the loyalists and negroes of Alabama should direct their old foes of the war time, and seek to tie their hands by constitutional restraints, but the mode is none the less bigoted and impolitic, and in a few years would make the authors of it themselves ashamed.

If the people of the State do not reject this Constitution, Congress will be compelled to pass upon it, and we do not doubt that it will at once correct the narrowness of its proscriptions. The classes disfranchised under its own acts are already too large. As the controlling classes of the Southern society—the men of character and leadership—they need to be reconciled, not repulsed. "If we cannot gain their support," said the late Governor Andrew—"the support of the strongest and ablest minds, the natural leaders of opinion at the South, to the just measures needed for the work of safe reorganization, reorganization will be delusive and full of danger." What Congress may do and should do, then, is to strike out all these political proscriptions, and insert in their place the simple test of an ability to read the Constitution of the United States, and to subscribe one's name to the registry. That, we believe, would be an end to the whole reconstruction muddle. First, because the test is that which is adopted in the most advanced and best governed State of the Union—Massachusetts. Second, because the test would be nearly impartial, as between the blacks and whites, in the present condition of Southern culture. Third, because it would hold forth a strong inducement to both blacks and whites to acquire the rudiments of learning and to support the schools. Fourth, it would meet the approval, or at least disarm the hostility, of the principal conservatives of the South, as we infer from their journals and recent speeches and addresses. Fifth, it would fall in with the views of the President, as he expressed them in Tennessee, and as they are now represented by Senator Donnell; and, sixth, it would not encounter a bitter hostility from the Democrats whose ablest and most influential organ, the World, not long since

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